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UNCLAS TEGUCIGALPA 002348

SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/CEN, WHA/PPC, WHA/USOAS, AND DRL/PHD
STATE PASS AID FOR LAC/CEN AND DCHA/DG

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: HONDURAN ELECTIONS: USAID TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO
SUPREME ELECTORAL TRIBUNAL AND NGOS

REF: (A) Tegucigalpa 2253 and previous

1. USAID has earmarked USD 123,000 of Bureau of Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance (DCHA) core funds under DCHA's contract with the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES) to provide almost three months of services from a highly regarded and experienced Spanish elections expert, Rafael Lopez-Pintor, and two months of services from an elections information technology specialist, Jaime Vargas, for the November general elections. DCHA also provided USD 65,000 to IFES to provide Mr. Lopez-Pintor's assistance with the February 2005 primaries, significantly impacting the transparency and openness of the TSE decisions and processes. Mr. Lopez Pintor has been working since September with the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) to develop strategic approaches to implementing the new elections law. Mr. Lopez-Pintor completed (a) an assessment of the TSE's organizational and administrative ability to conduct national elections, and (b) is providing direct advisory services to the TSE. Vargas has helped set up the information center for the quick count and tallying of the ballots with the TSE personnel.

2. USAID is also using about USD 216,000, converted from local currency trust fund resources, to fund a Cooperative Agreement with the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights. As such, the Center for Electoral Assessment and Promotion (CAPEL) is providing advisory assistance to (a) the GOH and NGOs in developing a national voter education program, and to (b) the GOH implementing the elections in accordance with the new law.

3. USAID's Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) provided USD 150,000 in financial assistance to electoral activities in support of the Ruling Justly Strategic Objective. This was added to USD 250,000 of USAID SROL funds and USD 150,000 of Economic Support Funds for use in the primaries. Specifically, funds were obligated on August 30, 2004 through an amendment to a Cooperative Agreement with the Federation of Development Associations of Honduras (FOPRIDEH), an NGO umbrella organization, in preparation for the February 2005 primaries. FOPRIDEH has been working, with USAID assistance, on electoral reform for several years, and was instrumental in building public and Congressional support to change the electoral laws. FOPRIDEH signed an agreement with the TSE to formalize joint cooperation during the 2005 election cycle, with FOPRIDEH centering its program on a civic education campaign (media and leaflets). The goal of this effort was to familiarize voters with the new voting systems used for the primaries as required by the new law and to promote a dialogue on the role and importance of civil society and political parties to democracy in Honduras.

4. On November 3, 2004, USAID, through the Strengthened Rule of Law Program (SROL), agreed to a GOH request to use USD one million (in local currency funds) to support the TSE during the 2005 elections. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was jointly signed with the Organization of American States (OAS) and the GOH Ministry of Finance (MOF) in order to collectively support the electoral process. Specifically, USAID funds were used during the run up to the February primaries for training, elections materials, an elections manual, a domestic election observers program, and in support of the National Registry of Persons (RNP). USD 245,000 in remnant funds was reprogrammed for the November general elections for a training of the trainers program for poll workers.

5. Given the importance of the elections, USAID also made the difficult decision to re-allocate USD 750,000 from the previously allocated 2006-08 justice sector activities with FOPRIDEH due to the foreseen negative impact of not having a voter education program and domestic election observers. While this will limit other projects FOPRIDEH will be able to do in the future, given the lack of other available funding and the urgency of this issue, this was deemed essential.

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